

Town Plan Goals and the Zoning Update 2019 – 2021

After the adoption in 2018 of the updated Richmond Town Plan, the Planning Commission turned its attention to updating the Zoning Regulations to bring this document into alignment with the Plan. Many of the goals identified in the current Richmond Zoning Regulations (RZR) and the new Town Plan are the same as they have always been: to maintain Richmond's rural character by supporting small-scale development, agricultural and forested lands; to preserve historic and iconic features of the town; to respect the floodplain of the Winooski River; to "grandfather" existing uses and structures, and to provide safety and secure property value for residents.

New features that have appeared in our social fabric over time have required periodic updates to the RZR. In 2003 a "Wireless Telecommunication Facilities" section was added. In 2015, we added a "Jolina Court Interim Zoning Regulation" to the RZR to deal with the possibility of finally remediating the contaminated Creamery parcel. After extensive negotiation, the developer and the Town were able to agree on a project, and in 2019 the Planning Commission and the Selectboard prepared the final version the "Jolina Court Zoning District" that now appears in the RZR.

New challenges will require new thinking in some areas. It is no longer sufficient for towns to solve only their own problem; town, region and state are all too interconnected. The housing crisis in Chittenden County requires us to think hard about how we can develop additional dwellings to house all current and would-be Vermonters. The recognition of the importance of large areas of contiguous forest land require that we develop ways of protecting "forest blocks." The economic threats to traditional dairy farming in Vermont require that we consider how best to encourage and preserve the open agricultural lands that we prize as a feature of rural character. The increasing importance of Richmond as an outdoor recreation hub will require consideration of our trail and path network. Climate change is forcing us with great urgency to consider how we can use our regulations to reduce the use of fossil fuels in the transportation and home heating sectors.

In addition, it is not clear what commerce will look like over the next 20 years. Even before COVID-19 brought new meaning to the phrase "work from home," commercial real estate was undergoing a radical transformation as retail moved online. Re-envisioning downtowns as service-oriented and gathering spaces rather than purveyors of merchandise; as areas where live/work opportunities and flexibility of building use are required; as spaces where car-oriented facilities yield to pedestrian- and public-transit-oriented facilities as we learn to drive less – this re-envisioning will take an awareness of what others have done and what is possible, massaged with local input and creativity.

Our task is to try to navigate between sometimes conflicting mandates. Between those who like things just the way they are, and those for whom things as they are just don't work at all. With this challenge in mind, here is a brief list of some specific goals we are pursuing:

- Keep Richmond's village atmosphere while welcoming change and growth
- Protect village neighborhoods
- Increase flexibility for village properties on the main streets by providing more opportunities for multifamily housing and commercial activity
- Increase on-farm commercial opportunities in the agricultural/residential district

- Increase housing density within walking distance of the downtown and in clustered developments outside the village that could eventually be served by public or group transportation
- Provide for the continuance of large contiguous tracts of forestland by clustering any housing near existing roadways
- Plan for renewable energy facilities
- Protect the historic appearance of the area around the Round Church
- Continue to prohibit development in the floodplain
- Support the development of Richmond as an outdoor recreation hub
- Consider whether / how to regulate short-term rentals (like Air B&B)
- Determine the exact features of buildings that constitute “character of the neighborhood” to make DRB review of projects more straightforward

We will be looking for your input as we consider these issues and others. We will try to be somewhat specific about areas and issues that will be covered in a Planning Commission meeting so you can budget your limited time for the meetings that interest you the most. You can also email your thoughts to Ravi, our town planner at rvenkataraman@richmondvt.gov.